

Message Text

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LIMDIS

FROM AMBASSADOR LODGE'S OFFICE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, VT, IT

SUBJECT: VATICAN PERSPECTIVES ON ITALY

SUMMARY: THIS REPORTS ON A CONVERSATION WITH MR. PETER NICHOLS, VETERAN LONDON TIMES CORRESPONDENT IN ROME, REGARDING THE VATICAN'S ALARM AT COMMUNIST GAINS IN RECENT ELECTIONS, THE DESIRE OF ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY (PCI) FOR CLOSER RELATIONS WITH VATICAN, VATICAN FEARS OF HISTORIC COMPROMISE, AND VATICAN'S EFFORTS TOWARD RENEWAL OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (DC). END SUMMARY.

FOLLOWING IS THE SUBSTANCE OF A 2-1/2 HOUR DISCUSSION OCT. 16 CENTERING AROUND VATICAN PROSPECTIVES ON ITALY WITH MR. PETER NICHOLS, VETERAN CORRESPONDENT OF LONDON TIMES IN ROME AND AUTHOR OF BOOKS ON VATICAN AND ITALY, TOGETHER WITH COMMENTARY ON THE SUBSTANTIVE POINTS.

THE VATICAN AND THE JUNE 15 ELECTIONS

1. MR. NICHOLS SAID THAT THE VATICAN HAS MADE REALISTIC ASSESSMENT OF JUNE ELECTIONS. IT IS NOW ALARMED AND SURPRISED AT BREADTH OF ELECTORAL STRENGTH OF PCI AND IS DISAPPOINTED GREATLY AT THE INABILITY OF THE DC TO PULL ITSELF TOGETHER. THE VATICAN IS ESPECIALLY WORRIED ABOUT THE DISORIENTATION AMONG ITALIAN

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BISHOPS AND LOCAL PRIESTS IN THE POST-ELECTORAL PERIOD. IT

REALIZES WITH REGRET THAT MOST OF THEM CANNOT HANDLE POST VATICAN-II AUTONOMY --THEY STILL EXPECT TO BE TOLD WHAT THE CHURCH LINE IS. THE CHURCH FINDS IT DIFFICULT TO DEAL WITH THIS PROBLEM. IT KNOWS THAT IN ITALY IT IS NO LONGER POSSIBLE TO PREACH FROM THE PULPIT AN EFFECTIVE CENTRALIZED POLITICAL LINE AND THAT IT MUST DEPEND ON VARIOUS GROUPS TO CARRY ITS CHRISTIAN MESSAGE. THE VATICAN IS THEREFORE IN A DILEMMA AND, IN ITS ENDEAVOR TO RESOLVE THE DILEMMA, IS CONFRONTED WITH VARIOUS PROBLEMS. SOME CONSERVATIVE PRELATES ARE PROPOSING AND UNEQUIVOCABLE CHURCH POSITION PROHIBITING CATHOLICS FROM VOTING FOR MARXIST CANDIDATES. OTHERS, HOWEVER, SUCH AS CARD. PELLEGRINO OF TURIN, WANT THE CHURCH TO AVOID ESTABLISHING A CENTRALIZED POLITICAL LINE. CARD. PELLEGRINO, FOR EXAMPLE, HAS ADOPTED A LIVE AND LET LIVE ATTITUDE IN HIS OWN DIOCESE, CENTERED ON TURIN. AT THE SAME TIME, THERE ARE CALLS BY "PERPLEXED" BISHOPS FOR THE EARLY RECONVENING OF THE ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE IN ORDER TO PROVIDE NEW DIRECTION.

2. COMMENT: OTHER EVIDENCE CONFIRMS THAT VATICAN ANALYSTS HAVE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE PCI MADE LONG STRIDES FORWARD IN THE JUNE ELECTIONS AND THAT VATICAN HIERARCHY IS GENUINELY ALARMED OVER FUTURE POLITICAL PROSPECTS IN ITALY. VATICAN ANALYSTS, WHILE GENERALLY AGREEING WITH LAY ANALYSTS ON CAUSES OF PCI GROWTH, ATTRIBUTE THE FUNDAMENTAL CAUSE FOR COMMUNIST STRENGTH TO WHAT THE EDITOR OF JESUIT "CIVILTA' CATTOLICA" TERMS "THE UNGLUEING" (LO SCOLLAMENTO) OF THE CATHOLIC WORLD IN POST-VATICAN COUNCIL II PERIOD. ACCORDING TO THIS AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE (THIS BI-WEEKLY IS CLOSELY TIED TO CURIA THROUGH ARCHBISHOP BENELLI, SUBSTITUTE SECRETARY OF STATE, WHO APPARENTLY MUST APPROVE ALL ARTICLES PRIOR TO PUBLICATION) THE "DISENGAGEMENT" OF THE CHURCH FROM ITALIAN POLITICS HAS LED MANY CATHOLICS TO ADOPT THE POSITION THAT THEY COULD DECIDE AUTONOMOUSLY WHICH POLITICAL PARTY TO JOIN AND WHICH POLITICAL CAUSES TO FAVOR. ACCORDING TO OTHER OBSERVERS, THIS PROCESS OF DISORIENTATION AMONG CATHOLICS, BOTH LAY AND CLERGY, HAS BEEN ACCENTUATED DIRECTLY BY HEAVY-HANDED WAY VATICAN EXERTED ITS INFLUENCE ON DIVORCE REFERENDUM AND INDIRECTLY BY VATICAN'S OSTPOLITIK -- ITS DIPLOMATIC DETENTE WITH SOVIET UNION AND MARXIST STATES IN EASTERN EUROPE. END COMMENT.

THE VATICAN AND THE PCI

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3. MR. NICHOLS, ON THE BASIS OF A RECENT LENGTHY INTERVIEW TO BE PUBLISHED SOON IN THE LONDON TIMES, STATED THAT BERLINGUER IS SEEKING CLOSER RELATIONS WITH VATICAN OFFICIALS. HE HAS LET IT BE KNOWN IN VATICAN THAT THE PCI WILL (1) SUPPORT A MODERATE UPDATING RATHER THAN COMPLETE REVISION OR TOTAL SUPPRESSION OF CONCORDAT; (2) GUARANTEE RELIGIOUS LIBERTY; AND (3) RECOGNIZE THAT "CHRISTIAN" ETHICAL PRINCIPLES WILL HAVE A SPECIAL CONTRI-

BUTION TO MAKE IN ITALIAN PROBLEM-SOLVING. BERLINGUER APPARENTLY BELIEVES THAT CHURCH ASSENT (OR NON-OPPOSITION) IS NECESSARY FOR EFFECTUATION OF HIS "HISTORIC COMPROMISE" PROPOSAL.

VATICAN "FEARS" HISTORIC COMPROMISE

4. ACCORDING TO NICHOLS, THE VATICAN FEARS THE "HISTORIC COMPROMISE" AND WILL NOT GIVE IT ITS BLESSING DURING POPE PAUL'S PONTIFICATE. SIMILARLY THERE WILL BE NO REDEFINITION OF MARXISM AND THUS THE VATICAN WILL CONTINUE ITS ANTIPATHY FOR CATHOLICS WHO VOTE FOR MARXIST CANDIDATES OR JOIN MARXIST PARTIES. ALTHOUGH THERE ARE GOUPS IN THE CURIA INTERESTED IN A "STEP BY STEP" DETENTE WITH PCI, THE PREDOMINANT ATTITUDE REMAINS CAUTIOUS. THE VATICAN IS AWARE THAT THE PCI DOES NOT WANT A FRONTAL CONFRONTATION WITH CHURCH, AND THAT IT IS MODERATE ON POLITICAL ISSUES OF DIRECT INTEREST TO CHURCH, SUCH AS ABORTION AND THE CONCORDAT. THE VATICAN, HOWEVER, IS STILL CAREFULLY MONITORING PCI CLARIFICATIONS OF ITS SLOGAN "THE ITALIAN WAY TO SOCIALISM," WITH PARTICULAR SCRUTINY OF HOW IT INTENDS TO BE "DIFFERENT" FROM OTHER COMMUNIST PARTIES AND STILL REMAIN A MARXIST-LENINIST PARTY.

5. COMMENT: MOST VATICAN OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT POPE PAUL WILL NOT GIVE CHURCH'S BLESSING TO THE "HISTORIC COMPROMISE" AS PRESENTLY FORMULATED AND UNDER PRESENT POLITICAL CIRCUMSTANCES. WHILE OPPOSITION IS BASED ON IDEOLOGICAL GROUNDS -- THE OFT-REPEATED INCOMPATIBILITY OF MARXISM AND CHRISTIANITY -- THERE ARE PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS WHICH DETER CHURCH FROM SUCH A COURSE. THE VATICAN HAS A HIGH ESTIMATE OF PCI'S "CLEVERNESS" AND SKILL, AND CONCOMITANTLY, A VERY PESSIMISTIC VIEW OF THE CAPACITY OF DEMOCRATIC PARTIES, ESPECIALLY THE DC, TO HOLD THEIR OWN GROUND IN A GOVERNMENT ALLIANCE WITH PCI. THIS DOUBLE DISTRUST IS DEEPLY EMBEDDED AND WILL BE DIFFICULT TO OVERCOME

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AS LONG AS PCI MAINTAINS ITS MARXIST IDEOLOGICAL POSITION, AND AS LONG AS DC REMAINS INCHEISIVE AND FACTION-RIDDEN. IT IS FOR THERE REASONS THAT "CIVILTA' CATTOLICA," IN A RECENT SERIES OF ARTICLES, ADMITS THAT JUNE 15 ELECTORAL RESULTS HAVE ALTERED THE TERMS OF THE EXISTING POLITICAL SITUATION, BUT CALLS ON ALL (NON-MARXIST) DEMOCRATS TO COMBAT THE "RISK OF A SURREPTITIOUS ENTRY BY THE COMMUNISTS" IN THE GOVERNMENT. ACCORDING TO ITS THESIS, A CHANGE OF SUCH A SUBSTANTIAL DIMENSION IN ITALIAN POLITICAL LIFE SHOULD NOT BE IMPLEMENTED WITHOUT THE PRECISE POLITICAL CHOICE BY ALL THE COUNTRY IN NATIONAL ELECTIONS. THE CHURCH, IN EFFECT, IS AT THIS TIME ADVOCATING THE REJECTION OF THE PCI-PROPOSED "HISTORIC COMPROMISE". IT HOPES THAT WHAT IT CALLS THE "SPIRIT OF SURRENDER" WHICH IS ADRIFT IN ITALY WILL BE ALTERED BY 1977 WHEN NATIONAL ELECTIONS ARE SCHEDULED. AND IT CALLS ON THE DEMOCRATIC PARTIES (READ DC) TO SHED THEIR "LETHARGY"

AND, BY RESTRUCTURING THEMSELVES AND BY ENGAGING THE PCI IN
SERIOUS "IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL BATTLE", CONVINCE THE ELEC-
TORATE THAT "LIBERTY IS NOT A VALUE TO BE BARTERED AND (SOCIAL)
JUSTICE IS NOT AN EMPTY WORD." END COMMENT.

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FROM AMBASSADOR LODGE'S OFFICE

VATICAN POLITICAL PRIORITY: RENEWAL OF DC

6. MR. NICHOLS ASSERTED THAT THE VATICAN IS ENCOURAGING THE
REBUILDING OF DC. IT IS NOT YET PREPARED TO DISASSOCIATE ITSELF
COMPLETELY FROM THE PARTY. THE VATICAN ALSO IS BEHIND THE MOVES
FOR REACTIVATING CATHOLIC ACTION GROUPS. MR. NICHOLS, CONFIRMING
THE IMPRESSION ONE GETS FROM READING THE PRESS, SAID THAT CATHO-
LIC ACTION GROUPS OF PROFESSIONALS, WOMEN AND YOUTH ARE MORE
ACTIVE AND ARE HOLDING MORE FREQUENT MEETINGS THIS YEAR THAN
LAST. BUT, THE VATICAN IS WORRIED ABOUT THE PROLIFERATION OF
CATHOLIC GROUPS. IT WORRIES ESPECIALLY ABOUT "CATHOLIC DISSENTERS,"
"CATHOLICS FOR SOCIALISM," AS WELL AS ABOUT SUCH GROUPS AS
"COMUNIONE E LIBERAZIONE" -- THE LATTER BECAUSE IT PROJECTS A
STRONG CONFESSIONAL IMAGE AND BECUASE ITS RADICAL REJECTION OF
CAPITALISM COULD LEAD IT EVENTUALLY TO MERGE WITH MARXIST GROUPS.
VATICAN INTENDS, THEREFORE, TO EXERT PRESSURES TO CURB THE
FORMER TWO AND TO NOURISH CAREFULLY THE LATTER NOT TO STRAY TOO FAR
AND BE ULTIMATELY ENGULFED IN MARXIST IDEOLOGY.

7. COMMENT: IT REMAINS TO BE ASCERTAINED WHETHER THE VATICAN CAN OR WILL DIRECTLY ASSIST THE PROCESS OF DC MODERNIZATION WITH ANYTHING MORE SUBSTANTIAL THAN PUBLIC EXHORTATION AND THE REACTIVATION OF CATHOLIC ACTION GROUPS. THERE ARE SOME TRENDS WHICH SUGGEST THAT IT MAY MODIFY SOMEWHAT ITS PRE-JUNE 15
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APPROACH WHICH WAS PREDICATED ON THE CONCLUSION THAT MORE IS TO BE LOST THAN GAINED BY CONTINUING THE CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH THE DC PARTY. IN THIS CONNECTION, THERE SEEMS TO BE MORE AND MORE IN EVIDENCE A VATICAN APPRECIATION THAT IN THE SHORT AND MEDIUM TERMS THERE IS NO OTHER INSTITUTIONAL POLITICAL ALTERNATIVE TO THE DC AS A CHALLENGER OF THE PCI. THIS IT APPEARS THAT THE VATICAN, DESPITE ITS REALIZATION THAT CONFESSIONAL PARTIES ARE NOT THE IDEAL INSTRUMENTS FOR PROTECTING THE CHURCH'S REAL INTERESTS IN THE MODERN WORLD, FEELS CONSTRAINED TO MAINTAIN FOR A WHILE LONGER ITS ASSOCIATION WITH THE DC PARTY. END COMMENT.

THE VATICAN AND ITALY: A GENERAL COMMENT

8. UNTIL THIS WEEK MOST VATICAN OBSERVERS SHARED MR. NICHOLS' ANALYSIS OF THE VATICAN'S ROLE IN ITALIAN POLITICS. VATICAN OBSERVERS WRITING FOR SUCH DISPARATE NEWSPAPERS AS THE CONSERVATIVE "IL GIORNALE" AND THE LEFT-OF-CENTER "CORRIERE DELLA SERA" AGREED THAT THE VATICAN WOULD CONTINUE ITS GENERAL "DISENGAGEMENT" FROM ITALIAN POLITICS AND, SPECIFICALLY, THAT THE VATICAN, WHILE NOT PREPARED TO SAY "YES," WOULD NOT SAY "NO" EITHER TO THE "HISTORIC COMPROMISE". THIS UNIFORMITY OF OPINION REFLECTED THE ASSUMPTION THAT THERE WAS A BALANCE OF POINTS OF VIEW AMONG THE POPE'S CLOSE ADVISERS WHICH PREVENTED ANY DECISIVE VATICAN DEPARTURE FROM THE NORM OF "DISENGAGEMENT".

9. TWO RECENT EVENTS, HOWEVER, HAVE CONVERGED THIS WEEK TO CHALLENGE THE THESIS. THE FIRST WAS THE PUBLICATION OCT. 20 OF AN UNEQUIVOCAL STATEMENT AGAINST THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE BY CARDINAL POLETTI, THE VICAR OF ROME, WARNING AGAINST THE POSSIBILITY OF A MARXIST ADMINISTRATION OF THE CITY OF ROME, THE CARDINAL STATES THAT, "I WISH TO AFFIRM WITHOUT ANY POSSIBILITY OF DENIAL, THAT EVERY YIELDING TO COMMUNISM OR MARXISM WILL NEVER FIND ME CONSENTING." THE SECOND WAS AN EDITORIAL OCT. 22 IN "L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO" CHARGING THE AUTHOR OF AN ARTICLE IN "PANORAMA," ENTITLED "THE VATICAN AND PCI TOWARDS A COMPROMISE," WITH CONVEYING "FALSE" AND "FRIVOLOUS INVENTIONS" AND UNEQUIVOCALLY STATING THAT "THE CHURCH'S LINE REGARDING COMMUNISM IS WILL KNOWN AND HAS NOT CHANGED." WHILE WE WILL BE EXAMINING THE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE TWO EVENTS IN A FUTURE ANALYSIS, THEY APPEAR TO SIGNAL A MORE VIGOROUS ANTI-MARXIST
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